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It now seems clear that the decade of the seventies will be a new era of vital social change during which the US will be forced to come to grips with the issues of war, poverty, and racism. Today's student unrest already indicates that a new order is emerging. Moderates seek change through reform and militants seek it through revolution, but both groups embrace the ideology of relevance and want colleges and universities to respond more aggressively to current social issues. If the demand for relevance in education is a demand for responsiveness, then institutions of higher learning must change from within and assume a leadership role, boldly asserting themselves as catalysts to set new directions, clarify vital issues, develop new knowledge, and devise new techniques to transform disorder into order. Higher education in the US may be characterized today as the "disaster area" of the social order. To remove this image and to make the institutional structure more appropriate for life during and after the seventies, educators could change the process of determining who has access to higher learning, renew the learning environment, remove barriers between campus and community, and reevaluate the whole apparatus of courses, grades, and credit hours. Modern students will take over the post-modern US one day, not by revolution but by inheritance, and the impact of higher education upon society today will determine the character of the society that is turned over to them. (WM)

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MAKING EDUCATION RELEVANT TO VITAL SOCIAL CHANGE: THE HIGHER LEARNING AND OUR NATIONAL DESTINY

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MAKING EDUCATION RELEVANT TO VITAL SOCIAL CHANGE: THE HIGHER LEARNING AND OUR NATIONAL DESTINY

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Platform Associates, Distinguished Participants in this Conference:

The planners and conveners of this conference have rightly discerned the proper theme and the proper issues fór our concern at this point in time.

Not only do we have a new administration to which our nation and world look for vigorous and courageous leadership in dealing with national problems and international issues, but this new administration will have to look to education as one of the principal resources in discharging an enormous responsibility. The demands made upon our political leadership and the demands made upon us who are educators are alike in their substance even if they appear different in their form.

The work of this conference may indeed bring forth the fruit of establishing a national agenda for American education.

I. The Issue of Social Change: The Decade of the Seventies

The particular question to which I have been asked to be responsive is appropriately placed in this conference: at the conclusion. I would like to believe it is here to constitute, not so much a note of finality to our thinking, but rather a note

of beginning to the thinking which we must engage in the immediate months ahead.

Already the literature abounds with printed matter bracketing "education" with "social change." The debates and discussions which this wedded relationship has engendered betray not only a sense of the kind of era our time represents, but also the kind of institution "education" is believed or hoped to be. There is evident in our thinking the belief that what our society is and what it does become is related in some way to what out institutions of learning are and become.

To think out loud the nature of this relationship is particularly appropriate now. For in less than seven years our national will both observe and celebrate the tricentennial of the American Revolution. In 1776, the Declaration by a people, tought weak, that they were free and independent of a nation, thought mighty, had implications for man's historical future which three hundred years afterward are still being felt.

Today, just seven years before the spotlight is turned upon the meaning of the American struggle of 1776, those of us involved in the shaping of national policy, in the development of national goals, in the formulation of national priorities, and in the establishment of national objectives - should do our work and perform our tasks in the spirit of 1776. Our main

preoccupation must be that of bringing to fulfillment the American Revolution of three hundred years ago.

We bear no small or easy responsibility in this task, for what we do in these few years may well determine the character, the substance as well as the form of what July 4, 1976 may mean for us and for peoples around the world.

It is not to exaggerate to say that those engaged in the business of education may well face the hardest task and the most difficult of the problems. The nature of our work and the character of the institution and cause we serve make us not only the guardians of our national heritage, but also the architects of our national destiny.

More than to the institution of church and state, our nation's people look to the institution of education to fashion the ideas that create events, to develop the programs that resolve problems, to invent the techniques that reach objectives and to express the spirit that shapes an era. So it has in the past; so it will in the future.

This is our calling and our mission.

Now, only sixt months remain before the decade of the sixties will have passed into history. Whatever label historians may assign to portray the style and flavor of

this decade now ending, it would appear clear that the decade of the seventies, on whose threshold we now stand, will certainly be the era of vital social change.

This is not to suggest that the sixties nor the times preceding were not times of social change. Our society, dynamic as it always has been, has been in a state of continuous change since its founding.

But I do believe that the period of the seventies will represent that period in our national life when we will be forced to come to grips - perhaps once and for all - with the issues of war and peace, poverty and prosperity, injustice and equality, disprivilege and opportunity, ethnic division and national unity.

While no one can predict with accuracy the shape of what is to come, the traumas of the social order to which the latter sixites have given visual and emotional expression suggest the dawning of a period when the nature of change may well determine whether mankind lives or dies, whether freedom reigns or is suppressed, whether society shall be governed by statesmen or tyrants and whether the American promise finds fulfillment or rejection.

It is not in my judgment a question of whether the social order will change. It is, however, a question of what kind of change and what will be its future.

Within this republic the decade of the seventies will for a fact bring to the full light of decision the fate of America's black citizens. Having waged a struggle for civil liberties they now have begun a struggle for social justice. More than the issue of civil rights, the issue of social justice (i.e. equity and opportunity) egages the fundamental questions of the way in which a society allocates and distributes its resources, it opportunities, its benefits, its powers, and its rewards.

Another generation will not wait to have that issue settled. It will be settled in our time.

The decade of the seventies will also join the issue of the balance of power between nations and the distribution of the world's goods and re ources. We will no longer be privileged to live on the brink of war; we shall be forced to make hard decisions for a lasting peace or a final war.

The state of our miltary technology and the nervous system of the world's popu!ation cannot sustain for long a state of uneasy peace or undeclared warfare.

And, without a doubt the social institutions - the state, the church, the higher learning - will be required to manifest a different form giving evidence of a different

content. For the seventies will be the years when the groping for social values will again occupy the first item on the agenda of mankind. And as these issues become the focal point for the institutions of church and state, the institutions of church and state will find their meeting ground within the institution of higher learning.

Educators, therefore, must be prepared for the centers of learning to be of the magnets that attract the frustrations of the young, the anger of the blacks, the hopelessness of the poor, the confusion of the whites, the fears of the rich and the bewilderment of the masses. All of these, representing a diversity of human emotions, possess an energy that can be harnessed to reform or if left alone, to destroy.

As we face this decade, one can only say to us gathered here that the text for our guidance may come from Isaiah which states:

> If you have raced with men on foot
> and they have wearied you, how can
> you compete with horses? And if
> in a land of peace you have fallen
> down, what will you do in the jungle
> of the Jordan?

For us, this simply means, "Cheer up, the worst is yet to come."

II. The Question of Relevance: The Rhetoric of Reform and Revolution

If indeed the institutions of higher learning constitute the meeting ground where the great questions and issues of church and state find their way, it is not accidental that on the campuses of colleges and universities would come the first tremors of a social order undergoing change.

The students and the non-students who have become both priests and prophets of the new order have clothed their ideology and baptized their mythology in the rhetoric of relevance. Intentionally ambiguous, freighted with deep emotional content and semantically poignant, the cry for relevance has become the battlecry of both the reformer and the revolutionist.

There are some students who seek change through reform and therefore hope to reconstruct; there are others who seek change through revolution and therefore aim to destroy. Both, however, have embraced the ideology of relevance. In resisting the latter, we must be careful not to repress the former, for a society or institution which fails to heed its reformers may one day be forced to deal with its revolutionists, and often in the latter event - in the process and as a result- there emerges tyranny for all and justice for none.

To criticize the moderate or the militant for having no vision of the new order to replace the old is not criticism of deep import. The prophets - on occasion - were immensely ambiguous in their vision of "a new Jerusalem" and scholars even today spend long years and produce equally long volumes trying to determine what Jesus of Nazareth meant by the "Kingdom of God."

One can affect the social order profoundly simply by having a conviction of what he is against as well as by having a clear vision of what he is for.

If relevance can be translated as <u>responsiveness</u> - that is, answering questions men are asking, meeting needs that people have, and seeking solutions to problems that do exist, then the demand that the higher learning be relevant as the first step to a more relevant social order is a legitimate demand.

I find in the demand for relevance, no denial of excellence. One could argue - and some have done so - that education has only been excellent to the extent it has been relevant - that is, responsive to the great issues and problems that have great import for the life of man.

While excellence and relevance have always characterized American education, the students seek from their institutions

and its leadership a more aggressive responsiveness in engaging the great social issues that are vital to man's present and future.

They sense in University presidents, trustees, and faculties a moral neutrality which they find abhorent and a failure on our part to pursue as vigorously the truth where the truth means that which is right and decent, as we do in pursuing truth where truth means that which is expedient and useful.

They find in their own social environment (namely the university campus) a social system bordering on feudalism, governed by doctirnes and administered by practices devoid of rationality, and an organization of men and women in pursuit of goals at odds with their purpose.

With deeper wisdom than we have acknowledged and with greater courage than we have confessed, our student have become our teachers and we their pupils. In ways characteristic of the young, they have rapped our heads to attract our attention and shouted their lessons to get us to listen. Their rudeness and their immaturity detract not at all from the insights they seek to share.

They have tried to call attention to the profound absurdities which govern our existence. They have tried to

call attention to the painful contradiction between our professions and our practices, between our public pronouncements and our private performances, between our doctrines and our deeds.

With an honesty that attests to their nobility, they have made clear that they do not like a nation advocating peace but pursuing war, or a nation believing in equality but perpetuating injustice or a nation affirming the rule of law but courting the reign of tyranny.

The majority of our activist students, as we all know, abhor violence and the politics of confrontation. Their uneasiness with our society and the institutions which sustain it should not be obscured by the acts of those who while using a similar language, seek a different solution. We must acknowledge that the students will in fact one day, "take over" the society, not by <u>revolution</u>, but by <u>inheritance</u>, and educators, first of all, should be deeply troubled about the kind of society we turn over to them.

The birth of a new order of thins is never without pain or dislocation. The emergence of the student mood which we euphemistically style "unrest" may indicate not only that a new order is needed, but also that a ner order is emerging.

What kind of order the new becomes may well rest upon the role assumed by our institutions of higher learning.

III. The Role of Higher Education: The Architect of our National Destiny

If the era before us appears as an era of profound change, and if the demand for relevance in education is a demand for responsiveness and responsibility, the greatest requirement for education is the requirement for leadership. To be sure, no one single kind of social institution will alone provide the solution to our nation's ills or the means by which orderly change takes place. But the instituttion of education most certainly will play the central role in designing our future even though other kinds of institutions may shape and determine its content. To put the matter another way, education can most certainly be the architects of social change though others may be called upon to be it engineers.

I am aware that there are those who would seek and argue for American education a passive role or indeed a neutral role in relation to the issues of public policy or social change. Those who do so have a notion of institutions of learning as being so-called "ivory towers" removed from the arena of hard social decisions and engaged in "objective" teaching, "pure" research and "disinterested" public service.

This, however, is an image that never was a reality and harbors a myth that has seldom, if ever, had foundation in fact.

In most societies, if indeed not in all, institutions of learning are social instituttions and social forces, and whether by conscious choice or selection, have excuted powerful influence upon the shape and character of the society of which they are a part.

And even if in the past, educational institutions have played the role more of a "thermometer" than that of a "thermostat", they now clearly have been inducted into a role fo social leadership which they cannot abdicate.

I must argue that our schools, colleges and universities cannot be - in the context of our time - simultaneously "neutral, catalytic and intellectual."

With the three historic missions universities have performed - teaching, research and public service - "noble objectivity" has seldom - if ever, been the true posture assumed by the educator; and in the choices of what is taught, what is researched and what publics are served, the educator and scholar has influenced public policy and affected social change.

What we plead for now is not the assumption of a new role bu the bold affirmation and embracing of a role and purpose which has always been latent or, at least, implicit.

American education needs now to declare itself as a catalyst - as opposed to a poturing of neutrality and aggressivly provide the leadership that will set new directions, clarify vital issues, develop the new knowledge and devise the new techniques that will make sense out of chaos and transform disorder into order.

Our teaching must involve not only the conveyance of knowledge, but conscious decisions about what knowledge really is, not only transmitting wisdom and understanding, but also clarifying modern problems and issues. Our research - more and more - must be directed toward that which can be <u>applied</u> to improve human welfare as compared with that claimed to be "pure" which is applicable to little, and our activities of public service must really serve more clearly the public interest and the public need rather than simply satisfying the public spirit.

If institutions of learning are to function simply as guardians of past heritage and tradition and "service stations" of ancient knowledge they should be renamed "museums," places where people go to reflect upon the past, and in their place should be erected new kinds of "houses of intellect" where people can go to shape the future.

What is it then that American education must begin to do to be relevant to social change? If my judgment has merit

that education will be relevant to social change to the degree that it engages in directing social change, then I would argue further that education can direct and provide that leadership more effectively by changing itself.

Riesman and Jencks characterized Negro colleges and universities as the "disaster area" of American higher education. I would characterize all of American higher education as the "disaster area" of the American social order.

This state of affairs need not remain, and the opportunity is before us to change the process by which we determine who has access to higher education, to renew the learning environment in which the noble quest for learning takes place, to remove the fences that separate the campus from the community and to re-evaluate the whole apparatus of courses, grades and credit hours in an honest effort to determine whether such structures and such arrangements are any longer appropriate for life in the seventies and beyond.

We must do this and more. But if we affirm this year to make the hard decisions to change for better that part of American society for which we educators are responsible, we can help our country to make those adjustments to change which will fulfill the American promise and make real the American possibility.

IV

We stand, as it were, at the point of intersection where two eras meet: the modern age and the post-modern world. Few generations before us have been affored the chance to create the future about which we have dreamed and the social order for which we have longed.

In searching to create a national agenda for American education, we also seek to determine the destiny of the American society.

We as a nation stand before the world as perhaps the last expression of the possibility of man devising a social order where justice is the supreme ruler and law but its instrument; where freedom is the dominant creed and order but its principle; where equity is the common practice and fraternity the common human condition.

Possessing as we do in our mortal hands the power to destroy, we must move to possess in our immortal ideas the power to reconstruct.

What we do in the months and years before us as we look toward the celebration of our humble but noble beginning will fix the future more solidly than what we have done in the months and years behind. We have both time and opportunity to make our nation not only supreme in its ability to destroy, but without a peer in its ability to create.

To us who have been called to this peculiar service the words of John Stuart Mill, quoted by Franklin D. Roosevelt in a previous period of great national decision, can guide well our action. He wrote:

> "The unwise are those who bring nothing constructive to the process of change and who allow great questions to be fought out between ignorant change on the one hand and the ignorant opposition to change on the other."

As educators, we belong to the company of the wise; let us now seek the courage to employ our wisdom for that which is good and for that which is true.

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